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New Testament Background: Selected Documents (Book Review)

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Campbell is no reflection whatsoever on Christ, only on man. There is no reason to lose hope.

Another advantage of Campbell's view is that changing one's mind about things becomes a fact of life. "A foolish consistency," Emerson once wrote, "is the hobgoblin of little minds," and Campbell would heartily agree. Institutions and traditions tend to rob us of our ability to think freely since they keep us from changing our minds—about anything. Once we ally ourselves with a political party or movement (say a pro-life or pro-choice movement) we've given up our freedom—so the doctrine goes.

By refusing to be a part of any institution, Campbell does attain a kind of freedom which allows him to change his mind quite readily about anything. In one interesting passage of the book, he confesses his distaste for Billy Graham; then, on meeting him and recognizing the media trash that has followed him, he sees he was perhaps mistaken:

Since 1947 when he stood in a California tent and almost equated the Communist cause with the devil, America with the Kingdom of God on earth, and William Randolph Hearst had passed the word to his newspaper empire to "pump Graham," I had thought of him as the worst of the religious and political right. But as I sat with him on a balmy summer evening thirty years later and thought of those who had replaced him, the electronic soul molesters hurling their satellites around the globe with a gospel of "Praise the

Lord and send me the money," "Take up your cross and relax," courting annihilation in the name of Jesus, while Graham had turned to denouncing nuclear proliferation, I found him a man of honor and integrity. Everything, I suppose, is relative.

What the long passage amply demonstrates, in addition to the changing current of his regard for Billy Graham, is Campbell's ability to write. No matter what one feels about Campbell's view of culture or Christ, readers will enjoy the vibrant style, the surprise cornered in most every sentence. He's entertaining, full of the gift of humor—earthy, yet devout in a mix that might seem to some more than slightly irreverent.

Yet there's certainty in his appraisal of the world in which he lives, and that certainty comes from the comfort Campbell receives from knowing, with a deeply embedded faith, that the Lord is in control and that His way is the only right way.

Campbell's *Forty Acres and a Goat* is a serious religious memoir that offers readers an insider's view of a difficult era in American history, an era which took on a problem that still seems far from solved. And it's an inspiration too to see this Will D. Campbell, the Christian Lone Ranger, lugging the Spirit into troubled times, then disappearing with only a prayer—no bricks, no mortar, no movements, no institutions, a preacher without a church, who sermonizes delightfully between the covers of a very fine book.

The New Testament Background: Selected Documents, by C. K. Barrett (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1989. xxix + 361 pp. Paperback \$14.95. Reviewed by Gerald W. Vander Hoek, Assistant Professor of Theology.

This book sets out to provide selections from ancient authors which in some way elucidate the world of the New Testament. It is a revision and expansion of a 1956 edition. While Barrett has omitted very little from the earlier edition, his second edition has grown by 85 pages, especially with more Gnostic and Qumran literature. The revised edition also has a friendlier format.

In addition to Gnosticism and Qumran literature, Barrett includes chapters on the Roman Empire, Papyri, Inscriptions, Philosophers and Poets, Mystery Religions, Jewish History, Rabbinic Literature, Philo, Josephus, Septuagint and Targum, and Apocalyptic Literature (including Mysticism). Barrett furnishes brief introductions to the primary sources he cites and comments on parts of the sources that might not be clear to a 20th century person. He also provides references to modern authors who discuss some of the areas covered by the book.

However, the introductions are uneven in scope and quality. While some introductions inform the reader about the value of this area as background for the New

Testament (e.g., Qumran, Gnosticism), the reader is left in the dark in other areas (e.g., Mystery Religions). For some areas, Barrett informs the reader of introductory secondary sources (e.g., Targums), but for others there is no mention of any secondary sources (e.g., Philo). A complete lack of any reference to recent critical study of rabbinic literature (e.g., Jacob Neusner) is also striking. Not all of the cited rabbinic texts are early enough to be considered as background for the New Testament.

Nevertheless, Barrett's collection of texts is very useful for understanding the first century world. I would recommend it for pastors, for theology students, and for people who wish to learn more about the world of the New Testament. It does presuppose, I might note, quite a bit of knowledge of history, philosophy, and religions by the reader. For the reader who needs some background to use Barrett's work profitably, I would recommend supplementing Barrett with a good introductory discussion, such as Everett Ferguson's *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).